

# Quindel Report

by County Supervisor Roger Quindel / Telephone 278-4259

For 18th District Residents / Winter 2003

## Tight Budget, Tough Choices Vital Services Survive with No Increase in Tax Levy

Despite facing huge hurdles, the Milwaukee County Board passed a budget for 2004 that kept important programs running without any increase in total tax levy collection. We had to make a lot of hard choices to hold the line on taxes while at the same time maintaining services that people truly need.

With the good news that there will be zero increase in total property tax levy comes the bad news that some of the impact of this budget will be painful and noticeable.

Exploding costs, reduced revenue, state-mandated spending, and other forces have put a lot of pressure on an already tight budget. For example:

- While property values in the county have gone up an average of 6.44% a year for the past five years, the average annual increase in total county tax levy collections has only been 2.5%.
- County health care costs have skyrocketed, averaging 13.49% more each year for the past five years including a 25% jump this year.

- The state continues to shift costs for mandated programs to local property tax payers, even though funding from the state to Milwaukee County drops. The 2004 county budget had to account for \$8 million less in state funds.
- Milwaukee County pays the state for residential treatment of children and youth with mental health and delinquency problems. State charges for those services have risen 7.49% per year in the last five years.
- Pension contributions to support retired county employees are up, largely because the county had to make up the difference caused by smaller investment returns while the stock market dropped.
- Big-ticket state spending burdens local property taxpayers. The county cost to run state courts is up to nearly \$33 million per year. This year alone, state youth delinquency services are a \$24.5 million county budget item.

### Parks and Other Departments will Feel the Pinch

Some of the results of county budget constraints (and restraint) will be obvious to many of us in the 18th District. Other areas of frozen or reduced spending will be a little more “below the radar.” Major spending decisions we made will have consequences in 2004, including:

- The county parks will still provide the basics to visitors, but there will be less grass mowing and quite possibly dirtier facilities.
- Caseloads will increase for county workers in human services, meaning less time and attention paid to individuals and families in need.
- Workloads for many other county workers will also increase due to cutbacks in staffing and job openings that will simply not be filled.
- Several upper management positions in various county departments have been eliminated.
- For the second year in a row, non-represented county employees (including County Supervisors) will not receive any raise in pay.
- Overall operations functions of the parks and public works departments have been combined to cut costs, and other departments are consolidating specific operations as well.
- Capital spending for new facilities and other projects has been dramatically reduced in order to free up county sales tax revenue needed to keep general operations going.

### Programs Saved for Now; What About the Future?

The County Board succeeded in fashioning a budget that is actually about \$3.1 million *below* annual spending levels proposed by tax “freeze” proponents in the state legislature. We also succeeded in making adjustments to the County Executive’s proposed budget in order to meet critical needs.

Major changes outlined below will help taxpayers and youth who rely on several county services:

- \$600,000 was added back to the parks budget to ensure that the basics get done.
- Funding for emergency shelter for the homeless was restored.
- Community support services for the mentally ill, which have immense value to those least able to care for themselves and help eliminate high-cost institutional stays, were kept in the good hands of experienced county social service workers.
- Some late night bus service that had been slated for elimination was revived so that hundreds of second shift workers who take mass transit to their jobs can get back home.

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Residents enjoy a workout in the fitness center at the Washington Park Senior Center

## Fitness Programs Help Seniors Age Well

Fitness centers equipped with strength training and aerobic equipment are now open at four Milwaukee County senior centers. The centers offer free comprehensive wellness programs for older adults, including one-on-one strength and cardiovascular training supervised by faculty and graduate students from UW-Milwaukee.

The Milwaukee County Department on Aging has opened the fitness centers as part of a continu-

ing effort to improve the long-term health of seniors. The county’s senior fitness program was initiated at the request of Supervisor Roger Quindel.

Washington Park Senior Center was home to the first fitness center. It was funded by a grant from state Department of Health and Family Services and was so successful that additional grants were awarded for sites at Clinton and Bernice Rose, Wilson Park and Grobschmidt senior centers.

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# Tight Budget, Tough Choices

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- Programs that fight alcohol and other drug abuse were maintained, recognizing that these efforts not only benefit individuals but also help keep families together, reduce crime and enhance the quality of life in our neighborhoods, and save money in lost work and health care costs in the long run.

It will be impossible to continue all of the positive things the county does for residents if, year after year, the state shifts its fiscal responsibilities to the county, the federal government reduces aid to communities, and health care costs run wild with no oversight.

Many factors beyond the control of county government influence our budget decisions, but that doesn't mean we can't fight for more sensible tax policies.

Right now, virtually all our tax dollars spent by all levels of government come from the bottom up, from the people who work hard for a living. Still, the over-reliance on the property tax in Wisconsin and in Milwaukee County puts us in a real bind.

For instance, I don't believe that social services should be funded on property taxes. And our bus system, while ranked number one nationwide in quality of service and cost efficiency, is the *only* urban transit system in the country that still relies on a subsidy from property taxes.

I will continue to pursue more equitable funding for necessary county services as the next annual budget shapes up.

—Roger Quindel

## County Won't Use Tyson Products During Lockout

All in-house and contracted Milwaukee County food service providers will be directed to stop using Tyson Foods products until a labor lockout at Tyson's Jefferson, Wisconsin plant has been resolved by a ratified contract.

I co-sponsored the County Board resolution that called for the moratorium on Tyson Foods purchases because the company is simply asking too much from its workers through a set of proposed concessions that will severely erode the area's tax base and standard of living.

When the international meat and poultry giant bought out the plant in Jefferson, it sought to drastically reduce wages and benefits for the 470 workers there.

The members of United Food and Commercial Workers Union Local 538 did not agree with the most drastic concessions, and the company has in effect locked them out after discontinuing negotiations.

Tyson Foods had total sales of about \$23.4 billion in 2002, with gross profits in the range of \$2.23 billion. The company chairman received a million dollar salary in 2002, not to mention an additional \$3.48 million bonus and millions of dollars in stock options.

Meanwhile, the employees have been asked to agree to a wage freeze that would last four years, a freeze on current pension benefits with no pension at all for new hires, increases in health care premiums and deductibles up to \$4,600 per year per family, reductions of more than half in sick leave and disability benefits, elimination of severance pay, and elimination of a monthly supplement that allowed retirees to pay for health insurance.

As the County Board resolution stated, we firmly and enthusiastically support the Tyson workers in

Jefferson in their efforts to obtain living wages, respectable benefits, and good faith bargaining from the company.

## Board Opposes FTAA

The Milwaukee County Board has opposed expansion of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in a move to stem the flow of jobs to other countries.

A resolution I sponsored against the new Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) pact was passed in November. FTAA would effectively extend NAFTA to nearly every country in the hemisphere (only Mexico and Canada are included now).

NAFTA has made it easier for companies to move jobs elsewhere, deny worker rights and avoid environmental responsibility. One estimate shows that Milwaukee County alone has a net loss of a minimum of 3,390 jobs due to NAFTA.

Those are just the local working people who have officially qualified for help from a special NAFTA unemployment assistance program. It's likely that thousands more have been affected. FTAA puts the worst elements of NAFTA into play on a much larger scale, promoting more use of low-wage workers producing goods that used to be made here.

FTAA also continues the trend of placing secretive international "corporate rights" treaties ahead of U.S. and local regulation on business standards and the safe transport of goods.

True free trade among nations is healthy, but there's nothing healthy about the barbaric working conditions and exploitation supported by "agreements" like FTAA.

*We're creating a world of producers who can't consume and consumers who aren't allowed to produce.* It was gratifying to see the County Board take a stand for a different kind of future for working people in both the public and private sectors.

# Fitness Programs Help Seniors Age Well

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UWM's College of Health Sciences Department of Human Movement Science is the county's partner in operating the fitness centers as part of the WellnessWorks program. All county senior centers participate in WellnessWorks. They provide older adults with opportunities to socialize with others, participate in recreational activities, and learn new ideas through educational programming.

All locations also serve as dining sites to meet the nutritional needs of older adults. Many other physical activities such as floor exercises, dancing, yoga, tai chi and special classes for those with Parkinson's and arthritis are available at senior center sites.

### Exercise Improves Health, Strength, Longevity

Research done by UWM has shown that the exercise programs are successful in motivating participants to adopt lifestyle changes with significant impacts on overall health, strength and mental well-being.

Results from a 2002 study indicated improved physical function and lowered levels of depression and anger among exercisers as compared to non-exercisers.

Milwaukee is one of only two counties in the nation to provide *free* fitness services to older adults. Equipment donations from Keiser Corporation and Bally's Inc. have helped keep costs down.

More than 1,000 area seniors (age 50 to 95) are registered at the fitness centers and many are taking part in a current research project aimed at showing how exercise and increased activity reduce risk of disability and lengthens the period of functional independence over the course of the aging process.

In 2004, Department on Aging Community Health Program staff will work with senior centers that do not have fitness centers to maximize opportunities for fitness activities in centers with limited space, equipment and staff.

### Fitness Center Locations

*The four senior centers listed below have equipped fitness centers that are staffed by upper level students of Human Movement Science from UWM. Activities are open to all seniors who have completed a health history registration form and attended one orientation session.*

*Fitness screenings and personal exercise plans are provided. There are no fees for participation. General weekday hours are listed for all locations below; call or stop in for times of specific fitness and other activities.*

#### Washington Park Senior Center

4420 W. Vliet St., Milwaukee

**Phone: 933-2332**

Hours: Monday-Friday, 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

#### Clinton and Bernice Rose Senior Center

3045 N. Dr. Martin Luther King Dr., Milwaukee

**Phone: 263-2255**

Hours: Monday-Friday, 8:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.

#### Wilson Park Senior Center

2601 W. Howard Ave., Milwaukee

**Phone: 282 - 5566**

Hours: Monday-Friday, 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

#### Chester W. Grobschmidt Senior Center

2424 S. 15th Ave., South Milwaukee

**Phone: 768-8045**

Hours: Monday-Friday, 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

#### Other Senior Centers

*More than 6,000 seniors are registered participants at senior centers sponsored wholly or in part by the county Department on Aging. The centers below do not have equipped fitness centers, but they do offer a range of wellness activities.*

#### Northwest Senior Center

7717 W. Good Hope Rd., Milwaukee

**Phone: 353-0731**

Hours: Monday-Friday, 8:00 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

#### McGovern Senior Center

4500 W. Custer Ave., Milwaukee

**Phone: 527-0990**

Hours: Monday-Friday, 8:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.

#### Asian American Community Center

120 N. 73rd St., Milwaukee

**Phone: 258-2410**

Hours: Tuesday, Thursday, Friday, 8:45 a.m.-1:00 p.m.

Staff speaks English and Chinese

#### Bethesda Senior Center

2845 W. Fond du Lac Ave., Milwaukee

**Phone: 445-3109**

Hours: Monday-Friday, 9:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m.

#### Indian Council of the Elderly

631 N. 19th St., Milwaukee

**Phone: 933-1401** (main office, not site)

Hours: Tuesday, Thursday, 9:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.

#### Kelly Senior Center

6100 S. Lake Dr., Cudahy

**Phone: 481-9611**

Hours: Monday-Friday, 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

#### Milwaukee Christian Center

2137 W. Greenfield Ave., Milwaukee

**Phone: 645-5350**

Hours: Monday-Thursday, 8:00 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

Staff speaks English, Hmong and Lao

#### Project Focal Point

811 W. Burleigh St., Milwaukee

**Phone: 372-1070**

Hours: Monday-Friday, 8:00 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

#### United Community Center

1028 S. 9th St., Milwaukee

**Phone: 384-2301**

Hours: Monday-Friday, 8:00 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

Staff speaks English and Spanish





Above: Milwaukee Simbas Soccer Club.  
Right upper: Youth soccer players.  
Right lower: Antwan McGee, Cougar Wrestling Club, dominates opponent at national tournament.



# Girls and Boys in Milwaukee Grow Along with Youth Sports Programs

The youth sports movement that took off in Wisconsin suburbs and small towns a few years ago didn't help many kids in Milwaukee. As I watched youth sports grow elsewhere, my work on the Health and Human Needs committee constantly reminded me of the staggering costs of working with youth *after* they got into trouble in our own community.

The connection between involvement in sports and better outcomes as girls and boys grow up was clear. I thought Milwaukee County should promote the development of new volunteer based sports organizations that target low-income and disadvantaged youth instead of spending more than \$68,000 a year for every kid we kept in a correctional facility.

Through a funding mechanism called the Milwaukee County Sports Authority (MCSA), the County now runs a grant program that distributes an average of \$200,000 a year to a wide range of sports programs. MCSA's primary emphasis is on serving boys and girls age 6 to 14 years.

Seven appointed volunteers oversee MCSA. They're among the many adults who have become involved because they love working with kids and being part of their success, not just in sports but also in all areas of life.

In just four years, MCAA has seen excellent growth in sports clubs and more and more youth are participating. There are numerous examples. Youth football has grown from two to 14 programs; soccer from four clubs to 27, girls basketball from none to 14; and wrestling from one to 10 programs.

**Support for Equipment, Uniforms, Coaches and Mentors**

The MCSA helps groups get started or expand to new sports by providing funding from \$2,000 to \$10,000 for up to three years. This funding supports equipment purchases, uniforms, and training of coaches and referees while giving organizations time to develop their own internal capacity to generate funds.

More importantly, Milwaukee County support has made more groups and institutions working with youth aware of the benefits of organized, structured sports teams.

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee researchers are now conducting a study to document what the coaches and adult leaders already know is taking place: much better grades and attendance, extremely rare criminal behavior, almost non-existent smoking and very little drug use. Not surprisingly, youth who start playing their sport early are also much more successful as athletes.

The MCSA is built on the concept of offering high standards and high opportunity to children who might not have the opportunity to participate without its support. It's far easier to teach discipline, healthy nutrition, leadership and good behavior to kids when they are young. A continuing relationship with a positive adult coach-mentor can overcome some of the negative influences in the lives of too many young people in our community.

*Society can spend \$68,000 to \$82,000 a year on institutionalizing a troubled youth, but by then it is often too late. It is far more effective to spend an average of \$75 a year to help the same youth find healthy activities led by positive adult volunteers*

**Making a Difference in Often-Difficult Lives**

As a volunteer soccer and wrestling coach, I have worked closely with about 80 city kids in the past six years. Of those who successfully completed at least one sport season only one has been involved in a crime during this entire period. Twenty-four of the 25 older youth I've worked with have graduated high school.

Kids on teams supported by MCSA demonstrate good sportsmanship. They attend school and earn good grades. They develop positive relationships with adults and peers and have long-term goals. Many of them have extremely difficult home lives, or no home lives at all. Yet these young people are succeeding in life against what are often long odds.

Properly run youth sports can make a difference in the lives of kids while costing literally one tenth of one percent of the costs of institutions. Can we afford not to invest in organized, structured youth sports?

The cover of the 2003-2004 Milwaukee County Youth Sports Guide. It features a collage of photos showing various youth sports: basketball, soccer, football, and wrestling. The title "Youth Sports Guide" is prominently displayed in large, bold letters. Below the title, there is a list of sports and contact information for various clubs and organizations.

The *Youth Sports Guide*, which I produced, is a complete listing of organized youth sports clubs in Milwaukee. If you would like a copy you can access it on the Internet at [www.milwaukeecounty.org](http://www.milwaukeecounty.org). Click on Board of Supervisors and then on my name. All sports information is on the bottom of the page. If you want to establish or expand a new sports program, the grant application and guidelines are at the same web site.

Finally, if you know of a sports organization that is open to the general public but is not included in the *Youth Sports Guide* please e-mail the addition, as well as any corrections, to [rquindel@milwcnty.com](mailto:rquindel@milwcnty.com).

—Roger Quindel

## Alternatives to Institutions Save Lives and Money

Eleven years ago, during my very first County Board Health and Human Needs Committee meeting, there was a discussion of contracts with residential treatment centers for juveniles such as Lad Lake, St. Aemilians, St Rose or St. Charles.

At the time, the cost was \$48,052 per child per year. I innocently asked for the *results* of the time spent at a residential treatment center. “How do these kids do after their stays?” The staff person representing all of the centers was baffled by the question.

He asked, “What do you mean? What do you mean?” I asked right back, “Do they attend school? Do they graduate from high school? Do they get jobs? Do these juveniles have positive relationships in their life?” These were basic questions; I was trying to find out exactly what society *gets* for \$48,052 a year.

Milwaukee County later did a study at my request, and not surprisingly the results were dismal. Three hundred fifty youth were in residential treatment then. Only half the youth even completed the treatment and the other half went permanently AWOL without any consequences.

Today the cost has soared to \$82,000 a year per child, but less than fifty kids are in residential treatment at any given time. These facilities have become short-term stabilization centers. Emphasis has been put on immediate intervention and working with the family and the child in their own community. Far more children are treated much earlier at the first signs of trouble. The percentage of youth who succeed in the program has soared.

**New Programs Stop Delinquency Early**

A similar situation occurred in juvenile correction facilities (Ethan Allen, Lincoln Hills and Southern Oaks for Girls). Five hundred fifty youth were locked up at a cost of \$37,065 a year. In the last audit of Ethan Allen, completed in 1992, the results were so poor that no study has been completed since.

Again, costs have now soared at these facilities to \$68,255 a year per child. But the average daily population has decreased to 296. Instead of paying a lot for lockups, Milwaukee County has developed many other programs that treat youth and their families early and often to stop delinquent behavior from becoming ingrained and untreatable.

Some of the cheaper (yet more effective) programs that have been established include First Time Juvenile Offender, Serious Chronic Offender, Probation Services Network, In-House Pre-Disposition, Level 2, Firearm Offender Supervision, Group Homes and Sanction. A new post-disposition girls program will be established this year to help reduce recidivism of young female offenders.

If Milwaukee County had not made these changes, to develop and use early intervention programs, the current cost would be \$66.1 million instead of the actual \$28.6 million cost expected this year.

These changes have freed the funds necessary to annually reach thousands of once untreated or sanctioned youth and their families. And we're reaching them far earlier and more cost effectively.

**Juvenile Crime Rate Drops Sharply**

Milwaukee County's juvenile crime rate has



# Alternatives to Institutions Save Lives and Money

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dropped sharply during the time alternatives to institutions have been put into place. Immediate intervention and accountability are having a positive impact.

Back in the days of my first committee meetings, some County Supervisors were calling for expanding the bed capacity of the Children’s Court Center from 88 to 240 beds. I led the fight to limit the expansion to 120 beds.

I opposed the much greater expansion because it would have put more funds into institutional care while draining more effective and cheaper community based programs. We’re starting to see the *results* of those programs now.

Holding delinquent youth accountable with early intervention programs has proven far more effective than ignoring repeated lesser crimes until the juvenile finally commits an armed robbery or assault with a deadly weapon and has to be sent away for years.

The best way to reduce county spending and taxes is to fund effective, early intervention programs that reduce long-term costs. It can be done and it has been done.

—Roger Quindel

## Collect Unpaid Taxes With a Personal Approach, Not a Sellout

When property taxes aren’t paid, Milwaukee County loses revenue needed to pay for services it provides. To ensure that taxes are paid on time, the law provides that late taxes must be paid with interest and a penalty.

When a property owner has been delinquent for one year, the county can begin to foreclose on the property. Foreclosure means that the county takes possession of the property. In other words, the county places a tax lien on the property.

But Milwaukee County doesn’t need property. It needs tax revenue. So, County Treasurer Dorothy Dean will help property owners bring their tax payments up to date by working out monthly payment schedules. The Treasurer’s office may also provide advice on how to communicate with lenders and where to find nonprofit financial counselors.

This personal approach to reducing the amount of unpaid property taxes has served us well. For any given tax year, the county has collected 95% of all delinquencies in less than two and a half years. Only about 2% of all properties in the county have had delinquent taxes at any given time during the past five years.

### Current Methods Yield Higher Revenue

Some have urged Milwaukee County to sell its tax liens to investors, who would pay a percentage of the amount of the lien right away in exchange for the right to collect the entire amount due and pocket it for themselves.

By selling the liens, some argue, the county would receive immediate cash that’s sorely needed in this time of budget crisis. Some claim that delinquent properties are too risky for the County to keep on the books.

In reality, however, guiding distressed property owners back to the ability to pay their taxes yields much higher revenue in the long run. *Selling tax liens would amount to robbing the poor and lining the pockets of wealthy investors, most of them out of state.* That is why I helped successfully oppose the effort to sell tax liens.

The County Treasurer and the bipartisan Wisconsin Treasurers Association voted unanimously to oppose the sale of tax liens in this state. We have all looked at the numbers and know that selling tax liens is a bad deal for all taxpayers.

# Soaring Health Care Costs Tax County Residents

Eleven years ago, health care costs in southeastern Wisconsin ranked seventh lowest among the 20 largest urban areas in Midwest and North Central states. Shamefully, our costs have now soared to number one. In January 2002, the Greater Milwaukee Business Group on Health released a study stating that health care costs in the Milwaukee area were 55% higher than in other Midwest cities.

Costs here are still rising 60% faster than the national average. This year’s 25% increase in Milwaukee County employee health care costs added \$20 million to your tax bill. Think about it, 9% of your entire county tax bill is going to pay *this year’s* increase in health care costs.

The public sector, including county government, is saddled with all-time high health care expenses for its employees. In addition, the medical costs of running county programs in mental health, juvenile corrections, the jail and the house of correction have skyrocketed.

How did we go from low cost to highest? From 1972 to 1983, a quasi-public agency comprised of the Wisconsin Hospital Association, Blue Cross/Blue Shield and the state made price recommendations that were followed voluntarily by participating hospitals. In 1983, the Legislature created the Hospital Rate Review Commission, which required hospitals to stay within the rates established by the commission.

Four years later, under intense pressure from the medical industry, the commission was abandoned. The hospital industry had taken the position that competition among hospitals and health care providers would keep costs down.

### Less Oversight, More Cost

But in the absence of government oversight, the so-called “free market solutions” have produced just the opposite result. Low cost providers have been driven out of business. Costs have soared. Federal Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement rates, which were established nationally during Wisconsin’s low-cost era, now fall woefully short of actual costs.

As health care costs soar, more employers drop insurance, and the additional cost of providing health care for the uninsured gets rolled into premiums for those who do have health care coverage. Practices that reward revenue increases instead of cost reductions have led to loss leader luxury “maternity suites” and extreme duplication of specialty hospitals.

For example, one area hospital actually built a heart care business staffed solely by doctors working overtime from another famous heart care facility. Efforts are concentrated on treating sickness instead of promoting healthy lifestyles and practices.

In the two counties of Milwaukee and Waukesha, stays for some kinds of illness are much longer in some hospitals than in others, and total charges to patients at some hospitals average twice as much as at others. Consolidation in the industry has led to the low-cost providers being merged with the high-cost leaders or driven out of business.

### The Patient Becomes the Product

The focus of the area’s health care system is how to deliver clients to hospitals and pharmaceutical companies. In doing so the patient becomes the product. A health care industry that is run to maximize costs requires more and more people who are sick. Preventive health care is too often ignored.

Already, health care coverage costs employers more than many lower wage jobs. And the industry is projecting costs to double in less than four years. That is simply not economically sustainable.

The health care industry should take actions such as the following:

- Develop a plan to reduce costs to the Midwest average through cost reductions and an emphasis on preventive health care.
- Reduce procedure costs at high-cost providers

to the level of low-cost providers (normal maternity costs can’t possibly vary from one hospital to another by a factor of three).

- Reduce specialty doctor payments to the Midwest average.
- Pay salaries and bonuses to hospital administrators for reducing costs, not for maximizing revenues.
- Build new medical facilities only when there is a demonstrated need.
- Reward covered employees for reducing health care risks and choosing the lower cost providers.

Rising health care cost is clearly a national problem. The U.S. pays almost twice as much of its Gross Domestic Product for health care as other industrialized countries, yet the U.S. is the only country that doesn’t cover all citizens in its national health care system. At the same time, health care indicators in the U.S. rank very poorly in many categories, from infant deaths to obesity.

While health care is a nationwide problem, it is entirely unacceptable that Wisconsin, a state with below-average income, is *number one* in health care costs. Health care costs are truly killing us. Finding ways to reduce them will remain a priority for me.



## Looking to Canada for Less Expensive Drugs

Milwaukee County will pursue changes in federal law to allow it to purchase prescription medications from Canada under a resolution I sponsored that recently passed the County Board.

Increases in prescription drug prices in recent years have been huge, adding to the cost of health services provided by the county to thousands of residents. The General Assistance Medical Program, Behavioral Health Division mental health services, House of Correction and County Jail all supply prescription drugs to individuals when necessary.

Department administrators have been prudent and tried to keep drug costs within budget, but at the same time do not want to harm any qualified residents by limiting medication options for treatment when drug costs go up.

Governor Doyle is already looking into state purchases of prescription medications from Canada, where prices are often significantly lower. My resolution authorized county officials to work on their own and/or join other units of government to find the legal avenues necessary to end the federal prohibition against such purchases.

Considerable savings to taxpayers will result if these drugs can be bought from Canada. They would be the exact same medications now purchased in the U.S., and despite the claims of high-powered U.S. drug manufacturers, they can be re-imported through a Canadian pharmaceutical system that has regulatory safeguards just as good as ours.

We would certainly prefer to buy from local vendors or those at least based in the U.S. However, until we join many other nations in keeping medications reasonably priced while ensuring decent profits for manufacturers and suppliers, buying from Canada makes good sense when taxpayer dollars are at stake.

—Roger Quindel